

COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

Comment:

February 8, 2005

The meeting of the Maryland Commission on Human Relations was called to order on Tuesday, February 8, 2005 at 10:10 a.m., in Baltimore, Maryland.

Present Thomas Owen, Roberto Allen, Norman Gelman, John Hermina, Peter Lee and Pamela Scarbro.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES The minutes of the January meeting were accepted as written.

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT Commissioners received copies of the Chairperson's Report (See attached). Chairperson Owen informed Commissioners that Patricia Hatch from the Maryland Office of New Americans would be speaking today regarding immigrants, instead of Michael Dennis. Chairperson Owen also informed Commissioners that several other speakers have been lined up.

Chairperson Owen informed Commissioners that Commissioner Scarbro attended an Immigrant Forum in Annapolis a couple of weeks ago. (See attached document entitled "Immigration Policy in Focus".

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT Commissioners received copies of the Executive Director's Report (See attached).

Budget Hearings The Executive Director informed Commissioners that MCHR is in the process of preparing for the agency's Budget Hearings. The Legislative Budget Analyst is in the process of preparing the write-up. The analyst will be evaluating the budget that was submitted and asking certain questions of the Commission. The two hearings are still scheduled for February 22, and 23, 2005. MCHR does not anticipate any serious issues.

The Executive Director informed Commissioners that MCHR is trying to work out the bugs in the agency's voice mail tree. If any Commissioner would like to review the menus in the system, please call 410-767-8600 and let us know of any suggestions to improve the telephone tree.

Community Outreach/Education Unit	Commissioners received copies of the Community Outreach/Education Unit's Report (See attached). The Executive Director informed Commissioners that the Public Affairs Coordinator is out sick today.
Legislation House Bill 828	<p>The General Counsel informed Commissioners that the Public Affairs Coordinator received a request from Delegate Joan F. Stern, who is having a bill drafted to address private clubs. There is a concern that employees of private clubs are not being covered under the employment discrimination title of MCHR's statute.</p> <p>Delegate Stern would like to eliminate the waiver for private clubs in the statute. Delegate Stern would like some technical assistance in terms of what would be the best way to accomplish this.</p> <p>The General Counsel also informed Commissioners that there are two bills that would somewhat involve MCHR. One is testing for alcohol in the work place and the other one is investigation of discrimination complaints in Frederick County. Frederick County is trying to get enforcement powers.</p>
Hate Crimes Bill	<p>The hate crimes bill has expanded its coverage to add sexual orientation and gender identity as protected classes.</p> <p>When MCHR receives copies of pertinent bills they will be mailed to Commissioners.</p>
DEPUTY DIRECTOR'S REPORT	<p>Commissioners received copies of the Deputy Director's Report (See attached).</p> <p>The Deputy Director informed Commissioners that the intake level is lower due to the absence of the Intake Supervisor. Intake level is lower than last year. Other similar agencies have seen a reduction in their intake levels.</p>
HUD Contract	The Deputy Director also informed Commissioners that there has been a substantial reduction in HUD funding. MCHR has not yet discussed or seen its HUD contract. HUD has not yet completed a budget packet.
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR'S REPORT	Commissioners received copies of the Assistant Director's Report (See attached). The Assistant Director informed Commissioners that MCHR is on target with this year's budget.
Information Technology Unit	The Information Technology Manager informed Commissioners that the agency's firewall died. MCHR has purchased a new firewall, which is an unexpected expense. MCHR has not brought any IT equipment in 2 ½ years. MCHR had been refreshing 1/3 of the IT inventory every year.

**GENERAL
COUNSEL'S
REPORT**

Commissioners received copies of the General Counsel's Report (See attached). The General Counsel informed Commissioners that a settlement was reached in the fair housing case of Newkirk v. Chase Management, Inc. This case involved racial discrimination wherein a 60-year old woman with a disability, attempted to rent a house, had put the deposit down on the home and was told that it was not ready. The Complainant became homeless for almost a year as a result of the discriminatory action.

Oral argument was held before the Court of Appeals in the Commission v. Baltimore City Recreation and Parks. This case deals with accessibility issues. The Commission was trying to enforce a settlement agreement with the City. Some of the agreed upon parts of the agreement had been completed, and some were not. The Judge ruled against the Commission and the Commission appealed the judge's decision.

OLD BUSINESS

Representative from
Md. Office of New
Americans

The Commission heard the first of several scheduled presentations on the problems confronting immigrants in Maryland, as initial steps in deciding upon the usefulness of holding a public forum on this issue. Chairperson Owen introduced Patricia Hatch, Program Manager from the Maryland Office of New Americans. The Office of New Americans is the state refugee office. Refugees are those who have been given status before they ever come to the United States because they have been recognized by the United States government as persons who are fleeing persecution in their homeland. Included in this category are persons who have been granted asylum to the United States. The Office of New Americans is 99% federally funded and most of the funds can be used only for refugees and political asylums. This office helps refugees and political asylums gain citizenship, learn English as a second language, learn U.S. history and government, find jobs and start a new life in the United States.

Commissioners received the following handouts from Ms. Hatch: An Immigration Glossary, Immigration Policy in Focus, Legal Status of the U.S. Foreign-Born Population, 2002 and Foreign-Born in Maryland (See attached).

The Commission meeting adjourned at 11:45 a.m.

Barbara Wilson